

# Three-way stretch

## LABOUR UNVEILS ITS PLAN TO NATIONALISE LAND AND SPLIT THE REVENUES



● David Wetzel

**B**BRITAIN'S Labour Party is beginning to mobilise itself behind a land nationalisation plan.

Left-winger Tony Benn, MP, has drafted a Bill which would nationalise all land except sites occupied and used by families and farmers.

"Don't under-estimate the support we will receive", Mr. Benn told a Land Campaign conference at the Greater London Council on June 15.

The nationalisation proposal divided the conference.

Mr. Benn's draft Bill proposes: "The ownership of land in Great Britain shall be vested in the nation to be held in trust for the people."

This seems to stand four square with the common law, according to which, from the time of the Norman Conquest, land is held by the monarch in trust.

Labour politicians, however, stress the nationalisation aspect, which many people suspect would cost them votes.

To try and deal with this electoral problem, the Bill exempts properties worth less than £250,000 that are occupied and farmed by owners.

Users of the remaining land would then have to pay a market rent based on the annual value of the sites in their possession. The revenues, according to the draft Bill would then be divided three ways:

- One-third to county councils or metropolitan counties;
- One-third to the national exchequer; and
- One-third distributed as a land dividend to every adult and child.

**O**NE OF the guest speakers was John Fraser, MP, Labour's spokesman on housing.

The conference chairman, GLC councillor David Wetzel, pointed out

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that Mr. Fraser changed his position on the land value tax three times during the afternoon: at first he was against it; then he endorsed it for agricultural land; finally, he agreed to tax urban land "with some limitations."

*A mountain goat would admire such agility.*

Another Labour spokesman, Frank Dobson, MP, pointed out that Mrs. Thatcher's government was encouraging the health service to sell off publicly-owned land.

He referred to the Hyde Park Corner hospital site which was on land leased from the Duke of Westminster, who owns most of Mayfair, including Grosvenor Square, on which the United States Embassy stands. The lease enabled the duke to recover the hospital site for £23,000 (the original price) even though the present value was about £5m.

Mr. Dobson favoured the common ownership of land, but maintained that Labour had to devise a way in which householders would identify with the land once it was in common ownership.

Mr. Wetzel pointed out that Labour's intention was that land alone would be in common ownership. Buildings would remain in private ownership, and people would not be driven from their homes.

**M**R. BENN'S draft Bill was being discussed at Labour's national assembly in September.

Although there will be much controversy over the emphasis placed on the planning system and the role of bureaucrats, the Labour Land Campaign Conference and the draft Bill may turn out to be major factors in reviving interest in the important part played by land ownership in the economy.

The anniversary of the Domesday Survey is approaching which seems like a good occasion on which to once again tackle the land question.

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